

VZCZCXRO9857
OO RUEHBC RUEHDA RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHAM #3125/01 3221203
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 171203Z NOV 08 ZDK PER MULTIPLE REQUESTS
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3838
RUEIFBS/OSC RESTON VA
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 6108
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 003125

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CORRECTED TAGS)

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PPD, NEA/I, NEA/ELA, IIP/GNEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KPAQ](#) [KMDR](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: IRAQI MEDIA OUTLETS BASED IN JORDAN: PROFILES

AMMAN 00003125 001.3 OF 003

¶1. (U) A number of Iraqi satellite television channels have established operations in Amman since 2005. These channels offer news and entertainment programming aimed at primarily Sunni audiences in Iraq and in neighboring countries. Following is a profile of the major channels, based on interviews conducted jointly by Embassy's Open Source Center and Public Affairs Section.

¶2. (SBU) Aghanina Channel: Emboffs met recently with Sameer Rassam, owner and chairman of the channel, and with Director Husayn al-Asadi, head of the Public Relations Department. The channel has been airing Iraqi and Arabic songs from Amman since November 2007 along with cultural programs which target Iraqi youth ages 15-25. The mission of the channel is to instill hope in Iraqi youth through songs promoting concepts of coexistence and peace and denouncing bloodshed. The channel also seeks to promote Iraqi artists and singers residing outside Iraq as a result of extremist threats and violence targeting performers.

Aghanina's revenue derives mainly from SMS messages. According to the director, the channel received 1,500 messages daily when it was launched, and now it receives over 10,000 messages daily. Eighty percent of the viewership is from Iraq while the rest reside in Syria, Jordan, and Gulf countries. According to the channel, the Government of Iraq (GOI) denies the channel the opportunity to air advertisements against terrorism because of the channel's name, "Our Songs," though at least one other satellite channel, Rotana, is allowed to air such ads.

Emboffs were given a tour of the channel's modest studio facilities, and watched the editing of a program titled Shako Mako "What's Up"), which aired during Ramadan. The program aimed to reach out to poor Iraqi families residing in Amman. The presenter, an Iraqi Armenian teenager named Rafi, visits poor Iraqi families and delivers Iftar meals consisting of Iraqi food platters. At the end of the program he presents a gift to the family.

The channel has offices in Syria, Baghdad, and Al-Sulaymaniyah. The Amman office has 23 employees (13 employees work at the 7th Circle office, while the rest work at the channel's office in the Media City in Jordan). In the near future, the channel has plans to transmit its signal on the Hotbird satellite in order to reach Iraqis residing in the U.S. and Canada.

¶3. (SBU) Baghdad Satellite Channel: Emboffs also visited the headquarters of Baghdad Satellite Channel located in the Umm al-Sumaq area in Amman. Emboffs met with Sa'd al-Tikriti, the channel's director. Al-Tikriti said the channel started in 2005, transmitting from Baghdad. At that time, the channel hired employees of the former Information Ministry. In April 2007, the channel's headquarters in Baghdad was targeted by a vehicle borne IED, after which the channel relocated its headquarters to Amman.

It currently operates from a villa in a residential area in west Amman under a license from the Jordanian Audiovisual Commission. The channel is facing legal problems with the municipality for being located in a residential area.

The channel employs 70 staff in Amman, twenty as news editors and correspondents. Twelve of the 70 employees are Jordanian nationals, while the rest are Iraqis. The channel has 50 employees working in Baghdad, and has other correspondents in Mosul, Kurdistan, Salah-al-Din, Al-Hillah, Al-Anbar, Al-Najaf, and Basra. The channel is currently working on hiring a correspondent in Al-Nasiriyah. Recently, the channel opened an office in Beirut and is preparing to open one in Egypt. Syria recently refused to permit the channel to open an office.

Baghdad Satellite Channel is currently conducting surveys in five Iraqi governorates to determine viewership levels. Al-Tikriti stated the channel aims to represent "the ambitions of the Sunnis in Baghdad." He also stated the channel receives no support from the GOI, though it is supported by the Sunni Al-Tawafuq Front. Advertisements and sponsorships are the main tools for generating revenue. The sponsors include unnamed non-government organizations which provide media training to channel staff. In 2008, Baghdad Satellite Channel signed four leases to use the nearby studios of the Jordanian ATV channel.

14. (SBU) Al-Babiliyah Channel: Al-Babiliyah Channel is located in the Jabal al-Weibdah area of Amman. Emboffs met with Sadiq al-Mutlaq, chairman and owner of the channel, along with former Iraqi Ambassador Sa'dun al-Zubaydi, and Haydar al-Mulla.

Al-Babiliyah Channel launched its Amman-based signal in early 2007. Haydar al-Mulla initially identified the channel as a mouthpiece for the National Dialogue Front of Salih al-Mutlaq, stating that the channel's mission is to highlight current Iraqi domestic political affairs. He added that the channel also airs news on regional issues affecting the Iraqi political arena. Ambassador al-Zubaydi

AMMAN 00003125 002.4 OF 003

disputed al-Mulla's account, saying that the channel is an independent media entity that is not affiliated with the National Dialogue Front. He asserted that while Sadiq al-Mutlaq is the brother of Salih al-Mutlaq, "this does not mean the channel dedicates the bulk of its reports to cover Salih al-Mutlaq's political activity or that the channel receives funding from the National Dialogue Front." For his part, Al-Mutlaq said that the channel is non-sectarian, and that its main mission is "to unify the ranks of all Iraqis and to reject heinous sectarianism."

Al-Mutlaq said that the channel has offices in Syria, UAE, Canada, and Baghdad. Twelve correspondents work in Iraq. Fifty employees work at the Amman Office. The channel broadcasts from Jordan's Media City and has another office in Amman located in the Al-Jubayhah area where the channel's studios are located. According to Al-Zubaydi, Al-Babiliyah receives between 10,000 and 15,000 SMS messages daily, indicative of its viewership.

Al-Mutlaq stated that he is the owner of two companies based in Dubai which provide enough revenues for operating Al-Babiliyah. Revenues derive from SMS messages and commercial advertisements. Al-Mutlaq stated that Al-Babiliyah was the first channel to air anti-terrorism and anti-Al-Qa'ida advertisements. He also denied receiving any funding from the Iraqi National Dialogue Front.

15. (SBU) Emboffs met as well with Faysal al-Yasiri, owner of the Al-Diyar Satellite Channel, at his home in Amman.

Al-Yasiri said that Al-Diyar started in March 2007 as the first independent satellite channel aimed at a general audience and which was not supported or funded by any party. The channel's headquarters in Baghdad is located in the same building as that of Al-Jazeera, 200 meters away from the Green Zone. Al-Yasiri said the main broadcasting is done from Baghdad. The channel also broadcasts from Jordan's Media City in Amman as a back-up, especially between 1400-1700 hours in the summertime, allowing the Baghdad equipment and circuits "to cool off."

Al-Yasiri said that the channel airs news summaries every two hours and a program called Minkum wa Ilaykum ("From You and To You") in which "news reports are gathered from the people and address their problems." Al-Diyar also broadcasts a program in which the host "criticizes official acts of corruption in a very cynical manner." According to Al-Yasiri, the program is popular among Iraqi officials. Yet another live program is titled "Baghdad Now and Baghdad Today," and features on-the-spot broadcasts from areas in Baghdad "that suffer from the effects of the war," drawing on on-camera statements by local residents.

Al-Diyar currently employs 132 employees, and has branches in Al-Najaf, Al-Amarah, and Babil. Because the channel is perceived to be independent and anti-corruption, other party-supported channels have requested that Al-Diyar carry their news reports on its scrolling news bar. Al-Yasiri provided Emboffs with copies of Al-Diyar's corporate objectives.

¶6. (SBU) Emboffs also recently visited the Iraqi Economic Channel located in west Amman and met with Alhan al-Shammari, director and wife of the owner, Abbas Kamel. The channel identifies itself as an independent Iraqi economic and trade satellite broadcaster that focuses on increasing development in Iraq. The channel airs the announcements of bids and other economic initiatives by GOI agencies. It also profiles Iraqi companies in manufacturing, trade, and construction sectors. It occasionally treats human development issues related to refugees, unemployment, education, and healthcare.

Operating since June 2008 in Amman, the channel is still going through the procedures to obtain a broadcast license from the GOJ. Approximately 60 percent of the channel's reporting will focus on Iraqi economic affairs and 40 percent on international economic issues. The channel employs 18 in its Amman office. Other offices are located in Syria, Bahrain, Dubai, and Egypt. Inside Iraq, the channel has offices in Baghdad, Basra, Najaf, Mosul, Karbala, Sulaymaniyah, and Erbil.

¶7. (SBU) Finally, Emboffs visited the Al-Qitharah Channel located on Third Circle in Amman. Emboffs met Deputy Chairman Shakir al-Falahi who said he is a partner in the channel along with a Jordanian citizen named Muhammad al-Ajluni. Ajluni serves as chairman of Al-Qitharah. He also owns Arab Broadcast Services (ABS), a broadcast feeder network based in Amman. Al-Falahi said that Al-Qitharah operates under the auspices of the ABS. He identified the channel as having a music video format restricted to Iraqi ballads and other love songs.

Al-Qitharah is currently broadcasting from Cairo with offices in Damascus, Amman, and Baghdad where it operates under the name

AMMAN 00003125 003.3 OF 003

Al-Misq. Al-Falahi said that the channel's Damascus office is the most active office due to the large community of Iraqi singers and performing artists currently residing there. Al-Falahi claimed the channel had achieved a significant following among a youth audience in northern Iraq and Baghdad.

Due to technical and financial problems, the channel has suspended its broadcast signal twice. One suspension lasted four months. The channel employs two persons in Amman, ten in Cairo, and four in Damascus, most of who are of Iraqi origin. Its Damascus office is headed by Sameer Fraq, an Iraqi.

According to Al-Falahi, the channel is independent, and relies on SMS messages and commercials for revenue, along with financial support, primarily in the form of employee salaries, from ABS. The channel also receives income from the rent of its four Satellite News Gathering (SNG) devices to other satellite channels. He added that the Al-Qitharah has been denied the opportunity to air anti-terrorism commercials by the GOI.

When asked about Raghad Saddam Hussein's involvement in the channel, Al-Falahi denied that Raghad has links with the channel, saying this a "mere rumor" based on the association of its former director Jawad

al-Ali, with Uday Saddam Hussein. Al-Falahi said if Raghda Saddam Hussein were to launch a channel, it would be a news channel that disseminates her father's ideology.

BEECROFT